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JESUS CHRIST AND GAUTAMA BUDDHA AS LITERARY CRITICS.

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The decay of Brahmanism.—The revolt of Buddha.—His rejection of the entire sacred literature.—His wrong motives.—Spread of Buddhism.—Its character.—Deification of Buddha.—The Old Testament canon.—Work of the scribes corresponds to later Brahmanism.—Jesus Christ rejected not all the Hebrew writings but the later additions.—Comparison with Buddha and Buddhism from this point of view.

The history of religious development in India has been divided into four periods: The first period is that of the primitive Vedic religion, called by Max Müller the poetic period (cir. 1800–1400 B.C.) The second was the Indra period (cir. 1400–1000 B.C.). During this period we note the beginning of a classified priesthood and fixed ritual. The third is the period of Brahmanism (1000–600 B.C.), brought about by the culmination of a priest caste and a change in the theocratic system. Finally we have the fourth period (600–200 B.C.), called by Müller the Sutra period, during which the art of writing began to be practiced. It will only be necessary for our purpose to consider the fourth period in detail.

About 600 B.C., Brahmanism became a speculative philosophy. The Brahmins arrogated to themselves the priesthood and sought to shut out the people from the esoteric wisdom, by which the old worship had been superseded. This caused a reaction against the priest caste. The people no longer believed in the gods, and why should there be need of mediators? In the old times everybody knew the Vedas by heart. They were the prayers of the people. Now the art of writing began to be practiced, but the Brahmins interdicted any writing down or reading of the sacred literature, thus anticipating the action of the church in the Middle Ages with respect to the Bible.

Opposition soon appeared to the priestly rights of the Brah-

mins. A restoration of the old forms of worship was demanded, but with no result. About the year 550 B.C., Gautama or Sakhya Muni, as he was also called, was born. He was of high rank, of royal blood. He was, moreover, an independent thinker and possessed a bold and indomitable nature. Becoming convinced of the falsity of the Brahman teaching, he struck at the root of the entire system. The foundation of Brahmanism was its sacred literature : the Vedas, Brâhmanas and Upanishads. Gautama declared these to be forgeries. He asserted that man could, without priestly mediation, and without belief in the sacred books, gain perfection. Gautama, by his total and unqualified rejection of the sacred literature of Brahmanism, placed himself on record as the worst radical literary critic of ancient times. But his action, as well as his motive, was entirely wrong. For, in the first place, we must remember that, although philosophic speculation had obscured the purpose and meaning of the sacred books, these books, nevertheless, contained elements of truth. The sacred literature of every primitive religion bears some approximation to Revelation. The innate feeling of dependence upon some higher power, because it is found in all races, places upon the religious systems of these races something like a divine seal. The maxim, *vox populi, vox dei*, often misapplied, holds in this question of the oldest Indian religion. A people that has worshiped in the words of the old Vedic hymns, bears testimony to certain elements of truth contained in these hymns.

In the second place, we must note the false motive of Gautama. Popular sentiment was against the despotic and arbitrary priestcraft of the Brahmins. It was a curse to the people. Brahmanism was a huge dragon, that crushed with his mighty body, and blighted with his poisonous breath, everything and everybody. The man who kills this monster will be the liberator and benefactor of his race. Now, although we cannot deny the sincerity of Gautama's convictions, we must, nevertheless, feel that he allowed himself to be carried away by a desire for popular praise. The fact that he utterly rejected all the preëxisting beliefs shows this.

The literary criticism of Gautama was accepted by the people, and the doctrines, which superseded the now discredited Brahmanism, were adopted by multitudes. Gautama attained unto the perfection which was the aim of his doctrine. He became the Buddha, "the Enlightened." Buddhism, as the new faith was called, spread with astonishing rapidity over India, Ceylon, Burma, Thibet, China and Japan. Century after century rolled on. Brahmanism continued to wane and Buddhism to rise until today, when we may estimate that of all the inhabitants of the earth thirty per cent. are Buddhists, and twelve per cent. Brahmanists.

The question which now arises is this: Is Buddhism an improvement upon Brahmanism?

Brahmanism was the result of a degeneration from monotheism to polytheism. Brahmanism, though corrupt and the vehicle of oppression, nevertheless retained some features of true worship. The people still believed in gods, and were, consequently, restrained in a measure from wrong doing, through fear; and stimulated to good actions by a desire to please the deities. The results were still beneficial.

How is it with Buddhism? We quote from Max Müller: "He (Buddha) denies the existence, not only of a creator, but of any absolute being. According to Buddhist tenets, there is no reality anywhere, neither in the past nor in the future. True wisdom consists in perceiving the nothingness of all things, and in a desire to become nothing, to be blown out, to enter Nirvâna." Here we find nothing either to restrain or encourage. The social and moral code of Buddhism is almost perfect, but adhesion to it is not prompted by a desire to better mankind, but only to benefit self.

Although Gautama shattered the old pantheon he laid the foundation of one still greater by his act. He unwittingly prepared the way for his own enthronement as a deity. Even after his death (477 B.C.) the two elements accompanying so many developments of religion, legend and anthropomorphism began to operate. The earthly life of the Buddha began to be obscured by legends. There is a large number of these legends, and they

purport to trace the history of the earthly life of the Buddha from the time of his birth into the world to his death. Kern, in his "*Buddhism in Indië*," says of them: "If we consider that these legends possess an historical constituency, we must, at the same time, acknowledge that almost all moments, from the wonderful birth (of Buddha) are nothing but mere fiction, a concatenation of flagrant untruths."

The anthropomorphic feature of Buddhism is manifested in the conception of the person of the Buddha. Although Gautama appeared during a period of time in which men were of ordinary stature, he is said to have been from twelve to eighteen feet in height. Again, he is represented as being able to reach heaven in three strides. He is larger than a certain evil spirit whose length was four thousand eight hundred miles. It is because of these conceptions that the followers of Buddha, in erecting his statues, tried to make them as gigantic as possible. This is illustrated by the image of Buddha erected at Kamakura, Japan, in 1250, which is still in an excellent state of preservation. This image is of bronze, nearly fifty feet in height.

It is easily seen from the legends and the conceptions of the person of Buddha, that he is believed to be a god. On no other ground can these superhuman qualities be ascribed to him. To the minds of people outside the pale of divine revelation, God is merely a man endowed with marvelous physical and mental powers.

We may sum up the results of Buddha's literary criticism as follows: (1) Rejection of the old faith, which, though degenerated, still retained some elements of a primitive monotheism. (2) Disbelief in higher powers. (3) Deification of Gautama the Buddha, and the creation of a new pantheon. (4) A grotesque worship, in which personal action is of no value (compare the prayer wheels of Thibet). (5) The crushing of all high ideals by a belief in the sole reality of the present.

Gautama Buddha, the ancient literary critic of whom we have just treated, was an Aryan; the other ancient critic, whose work we wish to compare with that of the founder of Buddhism, was a Semite; his name, Jesus of Nazareth. In studying the his-

tory of Jesus' treatment of the Sacred Scriptures of the Hebrews, we shall find many things strikingly in accord with the history of the Sacred Books of the East. There are, however, differences, and where these appear we will find the truth of the one kind of criticism over the other.

The art of writing was known to the Hebrews centuries before it was practiced in India. "The Lord said unto Moses, Write these for a memorial in a book (Ex. 17:14; cf. also, Ex. 24:4; 34:27; Num. 33:2). It is not surprising, then, to find that the Hebrew Scriptures were known and read before the birth of Buddha, and codified shortly after his death. Like the Sacred Books of the Brahmins, their "revealed" writings, the Hebrew Scriptures, were divided into three parts: *Torah*, Law; *Nebiim*, Prophets; *Ketubim*, Holy Writings. But like the Indian books, these divisions belong to different ages. They form, in fact, three distinct canons, the first canon is that of the Law. This is the foundation of the Hebrew worship, and hence corresponds to the ancient Vedas. The second canon is that of the Prophets, including most of the historical books, together with the prophets (except Daniel). This canon corresponds in time, but not in matter, to the Brâhmanas. The third canon is that of the Holy Writings, and has its counterpart in the Upanishads (hermit meditations). Note the meditative character of the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Lamentations and Ecclesiastes, which form the greater part of the Holy Writings.

Although the art of writing was practiced by the Hebrews nearly a thousand years before it came into vogue in India, it nevertheless ceased to be employed in *Hebrew* (rejecting the late authorship of Daniel) about the same time that the Sacred Books of the East began to be preserved in writing. The close of the canon is followed by a period of philosophic speculation in Palestine, founded upon the Scriptures, and corresponding to the Sutra period in India. This is seen in the professional labors of the scribes and rabbis.

As the result of the labors of these scholars, we have the body of Talmudical Literature, embraced under the heads of Mishna, Tosephta, Jerusalem Talmud, Babylonian Talmud, to which we

may also add the Midrashim and Targums. Of these productions there are two classes: Halacha and Haggada. Halacha is the traditional law, and Haggada forms the legends, religious and moral. This Talmudical Literature was at the first transmitted *orally*. The Mishna was written down at about the end of the second century A. D., and the entire mass had received its permanent form in writing by the end of the fifth century A. D.

The influence of the work of the Rabbis upon the Old Testament was immense. Although we find excellent precepts and much fine religious feeling expressed, we also find that these gems are overlaid and hidden by a veneering of puerile, hypercritical and grossly material teachings, the result of the time-serving philosophy of the Pharisees. But the most pernicious result of all this misspent labor, was the substitution of *tradition* in the place of the Sacred Scriptures.¹

We see, then, that at the time of Jesus of Nazareth, philosophical speculation had superseded the plain teachings of the Old Testament Books. We note a condition of affairs similar to that which we witnessed in the development of Buddhism. The problem which confronted Gautama confronted Jesus. The solution also lay in a question of literary criticism. Jesus solved it in a manner directly opposite to that employed by the Aryan critic. He accepted the old literature, the Old Testament, and rejected tradition.

But the central figure of the Old Testament prophecies was the Messiah, and since Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the fulfilment of these prophecies, the skeptic may answer that it was to the interests of Jesus to accept the Scriptures and reject tradition. In reply to this objection, we will only say that Gautama rejected the Sacred Books of India and by founding a philosophy was deified. Jesus of Nazareth took the opposite course. In the face of the teachings of a domineering priesthood, popular opin-

¹ "The words of the scribes are more lovely than the words of the law; the one are important, the other trifling; the words of the scribes are all important." To neglect the precepts of the phylacteries is a violation of the law, but is not counted a sin; but he who makes five divisions (instead of four), and thus adds to the rules of the doctors, is guilty." "The words of the elders are more important than those of the prophets." These sentences from the Talmud put tradition above the law of Moses.

ion and the accepted methods of worship, he boldly accepts the Old Scriptures and declares all current teaching, doctrine and opinions to be false. His course was not only difficult but fraught with peril. But he took this course not because it was more difficult but because it was true. It was because the Incarnate Son of God must declare the will of his Eternal Father. The fact also remains that, although the Messiah was the center around which the old prophetic structure was reared, the hope of a Messiah on the high planes indicated by the Old Testament Books, was dead, killed by Pharisaism and Scribism. Antiochus Epiphanes, "the scourge of God," would have had greater chances of being accepted as the Messiah than the lowly carpenter's son, because he had royal dignity and the force of arms behind him.

As in the case of Buddha, legends began to group themselves around the earthly life of Christ. These are contained in the so-called Apocryphal Gospels. These, however, were nullified by the authentic histories—the Four Gospels. Anthropomorphism did not appear, because the old literature retained the idea of One Supreme Spiritual Ruler.

It has been estimated that over thirty-two per cent of mankind are Christians. This number is steadily increasing. This vast multitude also attests the truth of Christ's criticism of the Old Testament, not, however, as man, but as God. A few comparisons between Christ and Buddha may be here made, in conclusion, to emphasize this belief. Buddha founded a system which was a speculative philosophy with religious embellishments. Christ founded a church with a positive belief in a Triune God, Omnipotent and Omniscient, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. Buddhism as a religion is attractive because it presents but two alternatives to the believer, either that he will become a Buddha or else enter Nirvâna. Christianity, on the other hand, embraces a system of rewards and punishments. Buddhism has never spread beyond those countries into which it was introduced by its first missionaries. Buddhism has touched all the nations that it will ever effect. It is a religion for the oriental. Here and there we will find an occidental who, attracted by the esoteric doctrines, in themselves vague and unsub-

stantiated, claims adherence to the "wise" Sakhya. Christianity has encircled the globe. Buddhism is a local religion, whereas Christianity is a universal faith. Buddha did not claim divinity for himself and was deified. This fact deals the death blow to Buddhism as a religion. It is one of the most potent truths of psychology that man knows his own being. He knows that he is mortal. Gautama certainly never taught or implied that he was anything else. We see, then, that the god of Buddhism, although not literally made with hands, is, nevertheless, of human creation. He is, therefore, no god. Christ, on the other hand, was always conscious of his divinity and boldly taught his pre-existence. Buddha as a critic became a false teacher. The sacred books of India which he rejected are also false, because there is but one recorded revelation of God upon which Christ has placed the seal of God.